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In this comment I express my puzzlement about Burrell's employment of "the distinction," and request further clarification. I also discuss at some length his views concerning free will. I explain the libertarian view as I understand it and point out why his criticisms of it do not succeed. I sketch out his own view of created freedom, and raise certain questions concerning that view.

David Burell is owed our thanks for his challenging and provocative paper. In responding to it, I hope in turn to provoke from him a response that will further advance the discussion between groups of philosophers who for convenience I will term "Thomists" and "analytic theists." Many times, sad to say, it proves impossible to bridge the gulf between contrasting philosophical approaches in such a way as to allow for constructive dialogue, but it is my hope (and, I believe, David's as well) that this case will prove to be one of the exceptions. I will spend most of this comment responding to the second part of his paper, in which he discusses free will. But first I will say a little about the first part, in which the main theme is God's creation of the world.

We need, according to Burrell, a "radical transformation of standard philosophical strategies," in order to speak properly about God. Mainstream analytic philosophy of religion has failed to see the need for this transformation, whereas the sort of Thomism espoused by Burrell does see the need and has gone a long way towards meeting it. Naturally, we need to hear more about this transformation. According to Burrell, it is made possible by attending to the divine creation of the world, and especially to "the distinction" between Creator and creatures. We need to be clear, then, about the nature of this distinction, and about what needs to be done in order to observe it properly. A natural place to look is Robert Sokolowski's book, *The God of Faith and Reason*,[1] which Burrell repeatedly cites and praises in this and other writings. It was Sokolowski who coined the term "the Christian distinction" to refer to Christianity's perspective on God, creation, and the relation between them; Burrell later broadened this to include Muslim and Jewish theologies, and renamed it simply as "the distinction."[2]

It is doubtful, however, that Sokolowski gives us enough to clarify what Burrell has in mind. Sokolowski points out that Christianity, in opposition to all forms of paganism, makes the distinction between Creator and the created world fundamental to its understanding of reality. In elucidating the distinction, Sokolowski points out that on the Christian view there was

a very real possibility that all the things in the world, and indeed the world as a whole, including ourselves, should never have existed. Furthermore, "we are to think of the possibility of things' not being, and of our own not being, in such a way that there is no less goodness or greatness—not 'in the world,' obviously, but 'there' at all."[3] "God could and would be God even if there were no world. . . . To be God, God does not need to be distinguished from the world, because there does not need to be anything other than God alone."[4] Still further, "God is not himself a competing part of nature or a part of the world."[5] These are excellent and important statements, but they cannot do the job Burrell needs done, because they do not discriminate among Christian thinkers in the way he wants to do. All of the major philosophers in the tradition of analytic theism—Alston, Plantinga, Swinburne, and others—would agree with what Sokolowski has said here. To be sure, he goes on to elaborate the theme in terms of Thomistic metaphysics, but we do not receive the impression that he regards this particular metaphysic as essential for a proper grasp of the Christian distinction. (To hold that this metaphysic is essential would imply a critical attitude towards earlier Christian philosophers and theologians that is foreign to his intention.) In fact, there is little indication in Sokolowski's book of a motivation that is strong in Burrell, namely the desire to use "the distinction" as a cudgel with which to belabor other, less adequate, versions of Christian philosophy and theology. This is perhaps most evident in their very different assessments of Duns Scotus. For Burrell Scotus, by insisting on a univocal sense of "being" that applies both to creatures and to God, led us far along the road that ends in our speaking of an idol rather than of God. Sokolowski's very different assessment of Scotus is conveyed in the following statement: "There are figures, like Augustine, the Cappodocians, Aquinas, Scotus, and Newman, who bring out the elementary issues of the faith with such force that they establish an intellectual age; one can hardly work with the Christian distinctions and identifications without taking the writings of such men into consideration, both as examples of the best that can be done and as expressions of the theological truth that is to be repeated."[6]

Perhaps, though, the denial of univocal predication, as applying both to human beings and to the divine, really is the key to "the distinction" as it is viewed by Burrell. (There is quite a bit in his article that might lead us to suspect that.) This may strike us as initially unpromising: Is the kingdom of heaven really founded on a doctrine of analogical predication? Still, grammar should not be sold short, as the Wittgensteinians will be quick to remind us. But there is a further problem here: the conception of analogy advocated by Burrell (and, according to him, by Aquinas) is so informal and apparently common-sensical that it's hard to see how it can be wielded as a cleaver to sever sound from unsound theology. There is no formal "theory of analogy" here, but rather the simple acknowledgment that all sorts of expressions frequently shift their meanings from context to context. Suppose Alston were convinced by Burrell, and abandoned his contention that there must be a univocal core underlying analogical predication. (Is it really wise, by the way, to patronize Bill Alston concerning the philosophy of language?) Would Alston then have to alter substantially any of his theological beliefs? I doubt that he would, and it doesn't seem that such a change could possibly have the import Burrell ascribes to "the

distinction"—an import which, according to him, amounts to nothing less than the difference between true worship of God and idolatry.

There remains, however, the "dual linguistic rule" formulated by Kathryn Tanner. Is it here, finally, that we must look for a clear formulation of the distinction? The first rule says that divine and non-divine predicates should be regarded neither as purely univocal nor as simply equivocal. True enough, but then hardly anyone would disagree (certainly not Alston); not many heretics are going to be caught in a net with a mesh this large. The second rule is to "avoid in talk about God's creative agency all suggestions of limitation in scope and manner. The second rule prescribes talk of God's creative agency as immediate and universally extensive." Here at last we have a formula with some bite to it, but surely more explanation is required. As it stands, it seems to imply that God's agency in the case of sinful human actions is exactly the same as for all other actions and events—but as we shall see, Tanner will have none of that. It is hard to see, though, how the needed explanations will not amount to some "limitation in scope and manner" of God's creative agency. Until the required explanations have been given Tanner's rule can perhaps function as a slogan to rally around, but certainly not as a precise definition of "the distinction."

Admittedly I have not in these few pages canvassed everything Burrell has said that might conceivably be relevant; I have, however, tried to focus on what seemed the most promising possibilities. So I will close this section of my comment with an appeal to David Burrell: If "the distinction" is as important as you say it is, don't you have a moral obligation, as well as a professional responsibility, to explain to us exactly what it is, and what must be done in order to observe it properly?

We turn, now, to Burrell's discussion of free will, a discussion which does not, however, leave the theme of creation behind. On the contrary: true free will is best described as "created freedom," a conception which is contrasted with the libertarian view of free will Burrell finds established among analytic theists, and which he pillories with considerable energy and enthusiasm. So we need answers to the following questions: What does Burrell understand the libertarian view to be? Why does he find it so conspicuously unsatisfactory? What does he offer in its place? I have to say, however, that I do not find it easy to determine from his paper the answers to these questions. At times I find myself straining to discern, through a thick fog of rhetoric, the philosophical points Burrell is trying to make. I hope, nevertheless, to have found some markers that will serve to guide us through the fog, but it will not be entirely surprising if at certain points I have strayed off the path of his thought. At the very least, I hope to set out clearly what I take him to be saying; if and when I have gone astray, I trust that my errors will be corrected with at least equal clarity.

What, according to Burrell, is libertarian free will? I believe it will be helpful if we take as a key his reference to Roderick Chisholm's description of the free agent as an "Aristotelian prime mover." Burrell notes that Chisholm's use of this phrase fails to correspond accurately with Aristotle's own meaning, but he seems oblivious of the fact that it also seriously distorts the libertarian conception of free will. The notion is most illuminating when it is contrasted with Burrell's notion of the will as responding

to "the lure of the good." "Human agents," he tells us, "cannot but act for 'the good,' however distortedly they may perceive it. We have no choice about that; but the very indeterminacy of 'the good,' reflected in inherently analogous uses of "good", assures that such an inbuilt orientation can in no way determine us to a single course of action. Quite the contrary, that very indeterminacy opens us up to countless possibilities, so providing the ground for rational choice." To which I respond, Bravo! Well said! We always act for a motive of some kind—something that is in some way desired, and thereby perceived as good, as desirable. But there are a great many different things, and different kinds of things, that we may perceive as desirable, even within a single situation. Furthermore (I would add) in some situations our desires for the different sorts of goods that may be available to us do not present themselves to us in a fully determinate "rank order"; rather, *it is we ourselves who determine, within the situation, what it is we most desire.* We do have some control, though not unlimited control, over the relative strengths of our various desires; one way we do this is by voluntarily directing our attention in this way rather than that. We reinforce our perseverance in a difficult task by dwelling upon the goods to be realized by its accomplishment, and we steel ourselves against temptation by deliberately banishing from our minds the thought of the pleasure that would result from a course of action we have recognized as being wrong or otherwise defective. (And of course, we may attempt to do either of these things, and fail in the attempt; that is an important ingredient in "weakness of will.")[7]

So far, I take myself to be saying things that are in agreement with Burrell's account of the will as responding to the lure of the good. (I postpone for now what he says about evil actions.) I do not believe, furthermore, that anyone can reasonably take exception to my describing the view I have set forth as libertarian. Why, then, does Burrell take himself to be expounding an *alternative* to libertarian free will? I believe the answer lies in the notion that is suggested by Chisholm's phrase, "a prime mover, itself unmoved." Almost incredibly, Burrell seems to think that the libertarian view entails that a free choice is one that *is not moved by the desire for any good at all!* This accounts for his use of the metaphor of "self-goosing," which is indeed excessively crude but which also thoroughly distorts the libertarian view it professes to characterize. I can only say that this entire line of criticism rests on a profound misconception; no one who understands the libertarian view can possibly find the criticism anywhere near on target.[8]

This is not, however, Burrell's only criticism of the libertarian view, and in fact it is probably not his main objection to the view. His most trenchant criticism is that the libertarian view *removes free creatures from the activity of the creator*, thus in effect "denying the universal scope of creation." This, he says, is an "essentially Mu'tazalite" view, refereeing to an early school of Islamic thought that was discredited in consequence of the relentless determinism embraced by Sunni Islam. (Clearly, one benefit of Burrell's study of Islamic thought is that it provides him with a whole new battery of heresies of which he can accuse his theological opponents!) But what precisely is the force of this charge?

In order to bring this out, I will now characterize more fully the sort of theistic libertarian view Burrell is criticizing. We suppose, then, that

someone is making a choice between two alternative courses of action. (Burrell seems somewhat averse to talking about choice, but I suppose he will agree that it does occur in human experience!) She is drawn to each of these alternatives by the lure of some good she envisages as resulting from it. The agent is a creature of God; she is a small part of a universe which in its totality was freely created by God *ex nihilo.* God continually sustains her in being; without this continual divine action she would instantly collapse into nothingness. Furthermore, in sustaining her God sustains her causal powers, including the power to make choices such as the one that now lies before her. When she does choose, God adds his "concurrence" to her decision, enabling it to be carried out.[9] Now, will Burrell agree that this account meets his objection concerning the "universal scope of creation"? If he does agree, I shall be delighted—but also greatly surprised. My prediction is that he will not agree to this, but why not? The answer is evident: because *the decision as to which act is chosen is made by the human agent and not by God.* This means, however, that the doctrine of creation, as interpreted by Burrell, entails that human actions are "created by God" in the sense that *God, and God alone, determines which actions shall be performed.* But once we see this clearly, it is evident that the doctrine of creation has been highjacked, stolen away and given a new meaning that is in no way implied in the original intention of the doctrine. A doctrine which is, as Burrell rightly states, the common possession of Christians, Muslims, and Jews has been appropriated in the interests of a strict theological determinism which has never been more than a minority view among Christians and Jews, and is rejected also by many Muslims; all who do not agree are judged to be pagans! It would be difficult to think of a more blatant example of theological imperialism!

Burrell is less explicit in setting out his own alternative to the libertarian view; here we must rely mainly on hints and allusions. He appeals to Kathryn Tanner's description of divine transcendence as "noncontrastive"; this apparently means, in this context, that the claim that the human agent decides which of two courses to follow is not to be set in contrast with the claim that it is God who so decides. Yet it is perfectly clear which of the two "decidings" takes precedence over the other; as Tanner herself says, "Given God's infallible working, human beings *must* choose when and what God wills."[10] This is as clear a statement of theological determinism as anyone could wish for, in spite of the fact that both Tanner and Burrell dislike the word "determinism."[11] (Objecting to one's opponent's choice of terminology can sometimes seem to be a rather transparent strategy for avoiding discussion of a topic one dislikes.) The idea is that since God is creator, and thus on a "different level" from the human agent, the fact that it is ultimately God who decides what the human being shall do in no way detracts from her freedom "on the creaturely level."

But what shall be said about actions that are evil and sinful? Here Burrell has some interesting things to say. "The good," he observes, "draws us on and empowers our choices by giving them a proper *telos.*" But this means that "malicious actions are such because they . . . bypass or run counter to this orientation as we refuse to let ourselves be engaged by it." And this in turn means that "by running counter to the inbuilt orientation by virtue of a refusal, evil actions can only be considered less than full-blown actions."

This needs to be carefully considered. It does not seem to be true, in general, that a morally wrong action is not lured or "drawn on" by some envisioned good. In a great many cases, the good that one seeks to attain through wrong-doing is all too palpable—enjoyment, economic security, freedom from fear and anxiety, release of painful psychic tensions—and is of a sort that, under different circumstances, it might be entirely right and appropriate for us to pursue. It is quite true, however, that in performing a morally wrong action we are neglecting the kind of good that in that particular situation is most important, the kind that it is incumbent on us, in that situation, to pursue. And in that sense, such an action is indeed defective; it falls short of what an action ought to be. Whether such an action is thereby also ontologically defective, so that it is "less than a full-blown action," seems to me dubious, but I will not pursue that point here.

Burrell, however, seeks to exploit this point to sharpen his critique of libertarianism: "It is primarily malicious actions which display the marks of 'libertarian freedom,' yet do so by *refusing* the dynamics of orientation to the good. So it seems odd to regard freedom so construed as paradigmatic for human free action." This, frankly, is rather strange. Who is it that regards sinful actions as paradigmatic? No one that I can think of! Perhaps what Burrell has in mind is that morally wrong and sinful actions are often cited in showing the need for a libertarian view, because they bring to the fore both the responsibility of the agent and the importance of not making God responsible—of not making God the "author of sin." But of course, morally good actions are equally good examples of actions that are free in the libertarian sense, as are many actions in which moral right and wrong are not concerned at all. It is a fault of some presentations of the libertarian view that they focus exclusively on actions which involve a choice between moral good and evil, and either imply or state outright that libertarian freedom manifests itself only in such situations. On the contrary, there are many other kinds of choices—many of those involved in artistic creation, for example—in which there is no question of moral right and wrong but which nevertheless involve diverse goods between which the agent must freely decide.

But to return to Burrell's account of malicious actions, what shall be said about the origination of such actions? At this point I offer an interpretation that goes beyond what Burrell explicitly says, an interpretation which is, therefore, very much open to correction by him. His account seems to be an adaptation of the notion of evil as *privatio boni*, and is suggestive of Augustine's remark that sinful actions do not have an efficient cause, but rather a "deficient cause." This means that we cannot and should not look for an identifiable cause of sinful actions; this is the "surd of sin," in the expression borrowed from Lonergan. In this way we avoid ascribing sin to God as its cause, without having to resort to a libertarian account. A little dialectical probing, however, reveals the weakness of this defense. Take the case of a particular sinful action. We ask, if God had willed that the agent should act virtuously rather than sinfully, and had given her the gracious assistance enabling her to do so, would she not have acted virtuously? Evidently, the answer is Yes, she would. But further: given that God does not supply such assistance, was it inevitable that she should act sinfully? The answer, once again, must be Yes, otherwise multiple disasters threaten: it

would then be the case that it is the agent herself who determines whether or not she would sin, and it would also be the case that she is able to act virtuously without the assistance of divine grace—in other words, we should have not only libertarianism but Pelagianism. But given these two admissions, to deny that God is the author of sin can be little more than a semantic evasion. God's causal contribution to a sinful action may not be the same as to a virtuous action; that much is true enough. But God, by placing the agent in a situation in which she is required to act virtuously, and at the same time declining to provide her with the grace that would enable her to do so, *guarantees* that she will sin; indeed he necessitates her sinning. I do not know whether Burrell will accept this conclusion or not; if not, I shall be most interested to see how he manages to avoid it.

It is interesting to see how Burrell's ally Kathryn Tanner responds to this difficulty. Given her premises, it would seem that God's creative will must be directly behind the conjunction of circumstances that leads to a person's sinning. But this, as she rightly sees, "conflicts with the premise of God's goodness,"[12] and cannot be accepted. And on the other hand, God's creative will cannot be that she should refrain from sinning, otherwise her actual sin would render that will fallible. In order to avoid both of these unacceptable consequences, Tanner must hold that God's creative intention includes *neither* the intention that the person sin, *nor* the intention that she refrain from sinning. Rather, God's intention consists of sets of subjunctive propositions, "propositions, that is, about what else will happen in the world should the creature sin, and what will happen within the world should the creature not."[13] This has the result of "multiplying, perhaps indefinitely, the outcomes that may conform to God's will for the world."[14] This does not, however, mean that God's will to save human beings is subject to failure: "The sinners' intentions are taken up within the intention of God for the world and are inevitably redirected to the end God wills, in virtue of the fact that God's will is directly efficacious of everything else in the world besides sin and the fact that God can always will with the same necessary efficacy that a sinner's heart be transformed."[15] This seems to me to be a remarkable combination of some deterministic elements with emphases more at home within a libertarian view, all brought to an optimistic conclusion in a doctrine of universal salvation. While I am formulating my wish list, I would very much like to know Burrell's opinion of these views of Tanner's!

In this comment I have expressed my genuine puzzlement about Burrell's employment of "the distinction," and have discussed at some length his views concerning free will. I have explained the libertarian view as I understand it and have pointed out why his criticisms of it do not succeed. I have also sketched out, as best I could, his own view of created freedom, and have raised certain questions concerning that view. It is my hope that in his response he will clarify further his own view, where that is needed, and will bring to a focus his objections to the ideas that are typical of the analytic mainstream in philosophy of religion. We pagans and idolaters, it seems to me, are owed that much!

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NOTES

1. *The God of Faith and Reason: Foundations of Christian Theology* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982).
2. I find myself wondering whether Burrell can afford to be as comfortable as he seems to be with the Islamic notion of *shirk*, the heresy of "associating the creature with God." Isn't that notion formulated, at least in part, precisely in order to condemn the worship of Jesus by Christians? As stated on a poster carried in a demonstration: "Jesus was a Muslim prophet, not the Son of God."
3. Sokolowski, op. cit., p. 32.
4. Ibid., p. 33.
5. Ibid., p. 36.
6. Ibid., p. 28.
7. Further discussion of this aspect of libertarian free will may be found in chapter 11 of my *Providence, Evil, and the Openness of God* (London: Routledge, 2004), and in chapter 6 of *The Triumph of God Over Evil* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008).
8. I do not believe that Chisholm himself understands the phrase in the way I am objecting to. His meaning can perhaps best be captured by adding a gloss: "prime mover, itself unmoved *by any sufficient cause.*" (See his discussion of motives that "incline but do not necessitate" in *Person and Object: A Metaphysical Study* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1976), p. 69.))
9. Actually the need for a distinct divine act of concurrence is controversial; I include it here in order to present Burrell with the richest possible theistic account of libertarian choice.
10. Kathryn Tanner, "Human Sin, Human Freedom, and God the Creator," in *The God Who Acts: Philosophical and Theological Explorations*, ed. Thomas F. Tracy (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), pp. 111–35; quotation from p. 127.
11. Following Richard Taylor, I take determinism to be "the general philosophical thesis which states that for everything that ever happens there are conditions such that, given them, nothing else could happen" ("Determinism," in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 2, p. 359). Theological determinism is determinism in which the relevant conditions have to do with the will and decrees of God.
12. Tanner, p. 132.
13. Ibid., p. 133. Tanner actually calls these "pseudosubjunctive" propositions, but this is an unnecessary refinement; the propositions are subjunctives pure and simple.
14. Ibid., p. 134.
15. Ibid., p. 135. For my own comments on Tanner's views, see my "God the Creator of Good and Evil?" in *The God Who Acts*, pp. 137–46.